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CONTESTING IDENTITIES: JEWISH-ARAB DILEMMA IN SUSAN ABULHAWA'S MORNINGS IN JENIN

Anam,

PhD Scholar,

The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India.

Abstract: The overarching impact of traumatic experiences often challenges contained epistemologies, compelling a re-examination of handed down assumptions. Identity—the most fraught subject of human civilization—seems to have waged numerous battles on the global platform. Zionism—the struggle for the liberation of Jewish identity on the promised land is one such example which has created an irreparable antagonism between Arabs and the Jews. With the aim of creating a homogenous Jewish society, this “artful violence” has led to what Amartya Sen calls “miniaturization” of people—boxing in existence—that has appalling consequences. The double-edged inclusionary and exclusionary narratives of Zionism is but not merely a product of evil intentions as the media portrays, rather a “conceptual disarray” that lends to the barbarity and turmoil we see around us. A person in reality is a confluence of plural identities—religious, communitarian, cultural, national, civilizational—each of which lends a particular affiliation that varies with the context. Violence is promoted by the cultivation of a sense of inevitability about some allegedly unique, often belligerent identity, which apparently makes extensive demand on us. Thus, there is a need to meditate, understand and respond to this manufactured crisis of human choice crafted by Zionism in the Israeli-Palestinian context that creates an illusion of a single hardened line of impenetrable division between the people of the Semitic faith. The paper attempts to (re)negotiate fuzzy boundaries of Identity with reference to Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* that depicts one of the most convoluted and protracted divisions in human history.

Index Terms- Epistemology, identity, Zionism, Semitic faith, fuzzy boundaries.

I. INTRODUCTION

Oscar Wilde Wittingly remarked in *De Profundis* (1997) that “Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else’s opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation” (Wilde, 1084). We tend to be influenced to such an astonishing degree by the people we identify with that it often threatens our individual choices and infuses the fire of hatred for those who lie outside the circle. The large-scale battles held in various parts of Kosovo, Bosnia, Israel, Palestine, Sudan and other places of the World are testimonies of identity politics and its baffling ramifications. Seeing the world as a “federation of religions or civilizations” and ignoring other ways that people see themselves creates this “solitarist approach” to human identity as Sen terms it, narrowing existence of beings as members of only one definite group. It creates the danger of misunderstanding the self and the other to a great extent and fomenting sectarian confrontations.

Zionism, which was initially conceptualized as a pluriversal and liberal phenomena to cultivate and nurture the association of Jewish identity with territorial memory but turned into a nightmare for the Palestinian natives living on the land. David Grossman in *Writing in the Dark* (2014) suggests that the primary aim of Zionism to create a safe haven for Jews—away from the turbulence of anti-Semitism—where they would truly feel at home remains an unfulfilled dream given the state of sociopolitical turbulence on the land of Israel and Palestine. Playing on to the permanent spiritual fixture—the longing for Zion—that permeates every prayer and ritual of Jewish tradition, modern Zionism gained momentum in political, cultural and religious spheres alike. However, its discourse of “double negation” with the famous catchphrase: “A Land without a People for a People without a Land”¹ made Zionist project highly susceptible to criticism from both quarters of the Diasporic Jews and the Arab natives. Adhering solely to the telos of Jewish national renewal in the holy land, it turned “morally insensitive” to the Arab Issue. Edward Said points out the detrimental impact of this exclusionary practice of identity: “to the walls constructed by Zionism have been added walls constructed by a dogmatic, almost theological brand of Arabism” (Said, 32). Therefore, a whole set of human rights violation was practiced in the name of “national security”.

¹ The slogan was first proposed by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the seventh earl of Shaftsbury in 1851 and was later popularized by Israel Zangwill.

Mornings in Jenin by Susan Abulhawa, a Palestinian-American novelist which was first published in 2006 under the title *The Scar of David* follows the trajectory of identity crisis of the Abulheja family through four generations of literally and metaphorically displaced Palestinian refugees. The narrative is broad in its scope, spanning half a century from 1948 to 2002 delineating all kinds of massacres, struggles and conflicts in the path along. The text lodges between the two sides of home as a sight for nostalgia and as a matter of political/national duty that creates rift between the people of the two communities who had lived together for centuries on the land. Negotiating politics, love and trauma in the face of essentialized ethnocentric vision of life, the text opens newer possibilities of conceptualizing the future with “mutual benefits” for both Israelis and Palestinians. Mixing diverse human experiences, it transcends antagonistic predicaments of fragmented memories and voices. As a diasporic narrative, it presents fluid states of identity that assures situatedness of the “ethical” in the rush of humiliating politics of separation and opportunism.

II. BELONGING AND POLITICS OF BELONGING

People can belong in concrete and abstract ways to a host of things from a particular group to the entire community of human beings. The categories depending upon the social and economic constructs, which has certain positionality along an axis of power are often fluid and contested and tend to vary along historical contexts. Identities conceived through a sense of belonging are mostly not constructed singularly rather are a product of intersectional variety of conditions that have their own ontological basis. However, the choices for responsible identity gets savagely challenged when these pluriversal nature of existence is unified into one allegedly dominant system of classification which can be either religious, or communitarian, or cultural, or national, or civilizational. Sen in his work *Identity and Violence* (2006) argues that such partition of people goes against both the liberal ideas that we humans are inherently same and also that we are diversely different.

When Amal in *Mornings in Jenin* reflects on her nostalgic yearnings for the Palestinian land, the “pangs of suffering” she experiences being deprived of her homeland is clearly visible: “We come from the land, give our love and labor to her, and she nurtures us in return. When we die, we return to the land. In a way, she owns us. Palestine owns us and we belong to her” (Abulhawa, 62). Being born in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jenin in 1970s, Amal had witnessed displacement and dislocation throughout her tender ages. Her sense of identity is double edged—marked by a sense of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong. As Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble* (1990)

of the performative aspect of identity: “repetitive practices, relating to specific social and cultural spaces, which link individual and collective behavior, are crucial for the construction and reproduction of identity narratives and construction of attachment” (Davis, 2003). In the text, we do find the character of the old Haj Salem narrating stories of the land and native experiences to the young children in refugee camps thereby reconstructing and reproducing identity narratives. Amal recounts with much fondness “the dynamic accounts of life and past events” that was narrated with such intricate clarity that Palestine and all her villages that were razed by Israel would come back alive to her mind.

Benedict Anderson defined nations as “imagined communities”. They are imagined because even the members of the “smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 6). This abstract form of community is based on a sense of imagined simultaneity which takes into account the ideas of former and future generations. Zionism as a powerful movement for Jewish identity embarks upon the notion of such imagined group of people who despite living in various lands across the continents for centuries, are supposed to retain their sense of longing for the Zion. Geroge Eliot’s novel, *Daniel Deronda* (1876) presents this sense of homelessness and subsequent longing of Jews lucidly:

A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of the earth, for the labors men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge. (Eliot, 8)

This idea of early home and its original dwellers lies at the heart of Zionist project that together weaves the imperial narrative of civilization, reconstitution and enlightenment to justify its means. Said calls it the “iron curtain of inhumanity” that has caused irreparable damage to the Palestinian natives: “no Palestinian, regardless of political stripe, has been able to reconcile him/herself to Zionism. . . [which] appeared to be an uncompromisingly exclusionary, discriminatory colonialist praxis” (Said, 23). Zionism had been this deadly combination of both—a savior for the Jews, who were homeless and facing persecution in Europe and a tormentor for the Palestinian Arabs who were looked down upon as inferior, marginal and irrelevant. Everything in the Zionist narrative was allowed and dignified due to the pure

force of arguments drawn from Western liberal culture of sciences, morality and ethics. Conrad puts it succinctly in *The Heart of Darkness*:

Conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion and slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretense but an idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. . . (Conrad, 19)

The “idea” being sacrosanct is impenetrable. Zionism prizing the ethos of *mission civilisatrice*, added dimensions of Palestine (“Judea and Samaria”) as a land associated with the covenant of God and Jews and called against the present backward condition of its people that gave leverage to them to rule over and establish their homeland. Post-Enlightenment Europe, when nationalism was burgeoning and state modernism was underway, the possibility of Jewish nationalism was also gaining momentum. Theodor Herzl, who is known as the father of the modern Zionist movement, observed the air of anti-Semitism blowing throughout the European continent. He therefore proposed in his 1896 work, *The Jewish State* that the Jewish question is not an archaic remnant of the middle ages rather a persistent reality that desires and deserves a political and secular resolution. For the first time in history, the Zionist organization pronounced for all Jews of the world: “We are people—one people” (Herzl, 76). The sense of belonging (“as citizens to one nation”) was politicized and thereby naturalized as being the dominant marker of Jewish identity. Eretz Israel then became the inextricable part of their “nationalized belongingness”.

Belongingness however is not just about construction of identities per se, but how these are valued and judged. John Crowley defined the politics of belonging as “the dirty work of boundary maintenance” (Davis, 204). Where on the one hand identity do provide strength to character and pride, making us do things way beyond our self-centered lives for the people of “our” group, the elixir turns poisonous when directed towards the outsiders. Israelis and Palestinians continue to experience the heat of dichotomous identities that inflict hateful penalties on the other side and rules out the possibility of sharing the common identity of human race. The meeting between David and Yousef with less than six inches between them sums up the little difference we have with other human beings. However, the stuffing into that little space and the attempt to maintain that distance is fallacious: “in that space fit nearly twenty years, a war, two religion, a holocaust, the Nakba, two mothers, two fathers, a scar, and a secret with wings flapping

in the slow butterfly way” (Abulhawa, 99). The two biological brothers, who are separated by social constructions make a farce of the identity politics that we attach so much value to. The very fact that Ismael became David and remained so even after the secret was revealed to him suggests that there is nothing sacred in constructedness of socially mediated identity. This cultural incarceration of beings is sometimes suffocating.

Violence in the name of identity is a highly misunderstood phenomena where sectarian activists want the targeted people to ignore all other linkages that could moderate their loyalty to a marked “herd” that is seen as inevitably unique and belligerent. Unfortunately, the reverse practice to stop violence in the name of identity also cash in to the same principle and this appears to be largely handicapped. Any peace or dialogical agreement presupposes “amity among civilizations,” bracketing human choices of responsible identity. The two friends, Hasan and Ari who shared common terrains of interest in the pages of “poets, essayists and philosophers” were divided by war. On being asked about his opinion on Zionism, Ari sounded troubled: “I don’t know, Hasan . . . I’m a Jew. I mean, I think it’s wrong. But you don’t know what it was like before . . . And now we aren’t sure if we’ll be safe” (Abulhawa, 24). The sense of insecurity in Ari’s eyes speaks volumes of what identity politics can instill in people’s heart and mind. The long-held friendship suddenly turned cold with interruptions by the war-mongers that changed the psychological and social geography of the holy land. Menachem Klein’s book, *Lives in Common: Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Hebron* (2014) suggest a shared past of the Jews and Muslims in Palestine before the advent of Zionism and Palestinian National movement that began to divide and define people as either Jewish Zionist or Palestinian Arabs. Years of co-operation between the two communities melted in thin airs with this political divide.

The state of War robs people of life and dignity. Yehya, the oldest patriarch of the Abulheja family felt disgusted with the curfew imposed on the Palestinians in their refugee camps: “How was it that a man could not walk onto his own property, visit the grave of his wife, eat the fruits of forty generations of his ancestor’s toil, without mortal consequences?” (Abulhawa, 48). The little habits of everyday life became a great deal of “conflicting issues” that home-made refugee had to bear with. The inhuman condition in their refugee camp furthered their anger to the degree of taking up weapons against the perpetrators of crime:

. . . a single tale of dispossession, of being stripped to the bones of one's humanity, of being dumped like rubbish into refugee camps unfit for rats. Of being left without rights, home, or nation while the world turned its back to watch or cheer the jubilation of the usurpers proclaiming a new state they called Israel." (Abulhawa, 78)

The psychological impact of the physical event of war in the longer run turns out to be causes of future battles, thereby continuing the vicious circle of violence. Identity politics as Sen believes cannot be challenged with its critique rather with competing identities that may lessen the heat of one overarching inflammable identity. We need to remind ourselves in the broadest sense of the commonality of shared "human identity" that might help in metamorphosing the language of hatred into peaceful reconciliations.

III. FUZZY BOUNDARIES: MOMENTS OF INTERSECTIONS

Many a times it is not just ourselves, rather others who impose on us certain boxed identities. Our freedom of choice is then largely stifled with socially reserved frameworks. "The Jew is a man" Sartre argued in *Portrait of the Anti-Semite* (1962). Shylock in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (1605) brilliantly resists this imposition of an essentialized identity that robs him of his humanity: "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is?" (Shakespeare, 245). Organized attribution often prepares the ground for persecution and burial. David explains to Amal the naked truth behind violence when she enquires of his behavior with Yousef at the Bartaa checkpoint: "the urge of power to impose itself for the sake of impositions. The elixir of unopposed force and the daredevil thrill of impunity" (Abulhawa, 266). When absolute power is bestowed upon a young angry man of twenty over the lives of others without accountability and restraint, violence is the only outcome with no logic or reason. We find identical sense of rage burgeoning inside Yousef when he watched his people dying like flees in the refugee camp: "He vowed vengeance, swore to cut their throats like pigs. He beat his head against the wall with no mercy for himself, still holding the telephone to his ears, still cursing. Still crying—the cries of a soul dying" (Abulhawa, 227).

War makes animal out of human beings who are no longer capable of rational decisions. The “dying soul” of Yousef is testimony of what mindless battles in the name of identity does to sensitive lives of millions of soldiers. Matthew Arnold projects with sheer sincerity the neglect or what Sen calls the “conceptual disarray” that lies at the heart of most battles:

And we are here on a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight

Where ignorant armies clash by night. (Arnold, 86)

The war veterans of WWI were called the “lost generation”. They were lost because of the sheer realization of the mindless act of violence that instilled in them a sense of guilt. David too experiences remorse for his deeds: “longing to go back in time. He would have done things differently. He would have taken Yousef in his arms and called him “brother”. *Would that have made the difference?*” (Abulhawa, 269). Similarly, Yousef ultimately realized the futility of violence and swear to overcome it through promise of love and humanity: “For I’ll keep my humanity, though I did not keep my promises . . . and love shall not be wrested from my veins” (Abulhawa, 322). One wrong cannot be corrected by another wrong. Hate begets hate and the vicious cycle never ends. Reactive self-identity is dangerous for healthy human evolution.

Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilization* thesis brings forth the two important approaches—reductionist and antagonistic—regarding identity. Firstly, people are necessarily seen through the lens of single dimensional identity. Secondly, civilizations are seen to be a clashing entity. Sadly, even the opponents of this theory contribute in propping up its intellectual foundation as they preeminently accept the same classificatory schema. It lays the foundation of misunderstanding everyone (“Self and the other”) even before the clash actually takes place. Sen argues that when modern conflicts are given historical tinge they appear to be much more grand and historical than the shabbiness of contemporary politics can offer. Therefore, civilizational approach to modern conflicts acts as a major barrier to focus more on prevailing politics and to investigate the dynamics of contemporary incitements. In the case of Israel and Palestine, the clash between Jews and Arabs are often interpreted as ancient feuds which places the two communities in a preordained role of enemies. It no doubt adds grandeur with richness and grave depth of history and culture but

makes the process of reconciliation all the more difficult. Sen asks a very pertinent question: “Whether in the world in which we live we are actually watching a grand clash of civilizations or something much more ordinary which merely looks like a civilizational clash to determined seekers of depth and profundity.?” Delving deep into the reality we realize the manufactured grandness of conflict in the Israeli-Palestinian imbroglio.

In the text, Ari Perlstein, son of the German Professor who had fled Nazism early and settled in Jerusalem and Hasan Abulheja, son of Palestinian farmer, developed friendship at first sight with friendly demonstrative gestures: “Thus, a friendship had been born in the shadow of Nazism in Europe and in the growing divide between Arab and Jew at home, and it has been consolidated in the innocence of their twelve years, the poetic solitude of books, and their disinterest in politics” (Abulhawa, 9). The innocence of childhood does not recognize the “dirty politics of identity” that cages human instincts of brotherhood and empathy. When Ari began to wear traditional Arab garb on weekends and Hasan learned to speak German to read and appreciate the tradition of Judaism, the two of them realized that their differences were not so intractable after all. Even their families took delight in the blooming friendship of their sons from two distinct wombs belonging to the same land. However, this serene serendipity did not last for long as the volcanic eruptions of Zionism melted the strong bonds of trust and care into thin layers of fear and suspicion.

The incident of stealing the child though unfortunate is also suggestive of the human instincts that cuts across manufactured borders and divide. Moshe and Jolanta who could never have a child of their own felt elated by the grasp of the little Arab child: “Jolanta’s face opened like a spring blossom. Her nurturing instincts overtook her depression, her ghosts, her misery. She held the precious child, half-drugged, dirty and maimed. She enfolded him with her deepest yearnings, caring not that he was an Arab” (Abulhawa, 38,39). Making Ismael suckle her dry breasts when no one was around suggests of motherly yearnings that a Jew woman shares with an Arab woman without differences. What Moshe wanted for himself was “wholeness”—a homeland, a wife, a family—that any ordinary human being would desire. However, because his means were not right, his conscience kept him haunting in isolated hours: “He had fought to save the Jewish people. But at his heels now were the awful evictions, the killings, the rapes. Moshe could not face all those faces, their voices. He found so little rest in his life” (Abulhawa, 99). Violence robs the peace of mind of humans. This is the reason why soldiers in the WWI suffered extensively from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders.

Amal asks a very pertinent question regarding violence performed in the name of identity:

“Why do dignity and honor hinge on stone and soil? Generation upon generation disembowel the earth, building monuments from her entrails to mark their time, to mold the dream of some relevance in an immense universe, to manufacture a significance from utter randomness, to attain immortality by seizing, stamping, gouging an immortal earth.” (Abulhawa, 290)

Blinded by the materialist desire for fame and power, people often forget the real essence of life. Fighting meaningless battles to assure their superiority, they manufacture enemies. The movie *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2008) based on a young adult novel by John Boyne is a brilliant example of feebleness of identity and its manufactured dimension. Bruno, a naïve eight-year old who accompanies his family on a move from wartime Berlin when his father is given command over the Auschwitz death camp, develops a strong bond with Shmuel (“Jew”)—the boy in the striped pyjamas. He is unable to decipher the ominous aspects of his friend’s character as indoctrinated through the discussion of the elders at home. Rather understanding though partially the gravity of Shmuel’s circumstances, Bruno is forced to reassess the character of his beloved father—as a man who helps people—in a new light. While helping his friend to find his lost father, when Bruno takes up the Jewish garb of striped pyjamas to himself, he is gassed to death along with other Jews in the concentration camp. The accident sheds light on the absurdity of essentialized identity which is hallowed as sacrosanct. A Christian boy is immediately (mis)construed as a “Jew” by the mere appearance of his garb. Religious identity then is not even skin deep and thus too feeble to kill and die for.

The silent exchange between Amal and the Israeli soldier is enticing. Amal realizes the helplessness in his eyes with the tough uniform of a soldier:

He blinks hard. And a solitary drop of sweat travels from his brow . . . The power he holds over life is a staggering burden for so young a man . . . I know he has killed before. He knows I know. But he has never seen his victim’s face. My eyes, soft with a mother’s love and a dead woman’s calm, weighs him down with his own power and I think he will cry. Not now. Later. When he is face-to-face with his dreams and his future. I feel sad for him. Sad for the boy bound to the killer. I am sad for the youths betrayed by their leaders for symbols and flags and war and power.” (Abulhawa, 306)

The intimate glance between two human beings who are trapped under the layers of their concocted identities suggests the helplessness of ordinary beings in the larger game of dirty politics. The “conceptually parasitic” vision which they have been indoctrinated with robs them off of the instinct of human existence—love, empathy, brotherhood that cuts across national divides. They then tend to ignore the similarities, connections, interdependence and interactions of civilizations in the past. It leads to a very “improvised” version of the past that yields limited scope for future as well. The long-shared history of Jews, Christians and Muslims on the holy land is a fact deliberately neglected in the discourse of Zionism to develop narrow lanes of essentialized Jewish identity which is Ashkenazi to a larger extent. Going deep into their rhetoric and political discourses, one realizes the absolute silence of Sephardic and Mizrahi culture of Jews as well. It makes Zionism an extremely opportunistic and shrunken ideology for the Jewish community itself, leave alone the gentiles. The narrative exposes the fuzzy boundaries of identity constructed between Jews and Muslims in Palestine and Israel who had been sharing the land for thousands of years.

IV. THE DIRECTION OF RECONSIDERATION

To oppose Zionism in Palestine has never meant, and does not now mean, being anti-Semitic; conversely, the struggle for Palestinian rights and self-determination does not mean support for the Saudi royal family, nor for the antiquated and oppressive state structures of most of the Arab nation.

~Edward Said, *Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victim*

There is a need to suspend prejudices and trash the faulty way of perceiving the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians which contributes to a larger extent in manufacturing “imagined enemies” and mystifying the actual issues. Anton Chekhov, the Russian writer once said, a solution to a problem and a correct way of posing a problem are two completely separate things. And the role of a writer/intellectual is the latter. *Mornings in Jenin* in a very subtle way critiques the idea of “identity politics”, which deliberately keeps the two communities apart.

Haj Salem, the old patriarch in the Palestinian refugee camp of Jenin bestows words of wisdom to Amal about human life. He says that the greatest treasure life offers to human beings is mind and heart, which with the indispensable tools of time and health if utilized properly can benefit not only the self, but the cause of humanity at large. Intellect and emotion are two universal features engrained in people irrespective of their identity. It helps one

to maintain balance in life and be humane. When David writes at last on Sara's website www.aprilblossom.com: "I'll never be wholly Jew or Muslim. Never wholly Palestinian or Israeli. Your acceptance made me content to be merely human. You understood that though I was capable of great cruelty, so am I of great love" (Abulhawa, 320). All of us do possess the Apollonian and Dionysian sides of our personality. When the other recognizes the human-ness engrained in oneself, it is a moment of revelation and utmost power. what David suggest by this is an important direction in which solution can be sought—accepting the other as a human being with both merits and flaws. In his magnum opus, *Truth and Method* (1989), Gadamer shows how understanding a text or even a person is constructed not on the model of the scientific/detached grasp of that object per se but rather subjective lenses that we carry all along, tempered by our social, political, and cultural lenses. However, there exists the possibility of overcoming at least partially the trap of these historically formed grids. The experience is but of a negative nature where we are to be disappointed by our expectations. False generalizations are continually refuted by our experiences. Hence, only when we begin to see things in a new light, with fresh perspective initiated by our interactions with the other do we encounter "experience" in the truest sense. Gadamer's "fusion of horizon" entails dialogical engagement, that expands the former limits of our hermeneutical horizon: "the negativity of experience has a curiously productive meaning" (Gadamer 353). Dialogue does possess the power of synthesizing or at least blunting the sharp edges of antagonism.

David and Amal undergo a change of character and perception towards the end of the narrative where they acknowledge the human element of the other. This development of "compassion" in the heart and soul of a Jew for an Arab and vice-versa suspends the dominant discourse of enmity. It deconstructs history, through lived experiences and therefore open the way forward. Derrida in his essay "On Forgiveness" argues for the need of unconditional forgiveness. He says that if forgiveness forgave only the forgivable, then, the very idea of forgiveness would disappear: "[If] I forgive you on the condition that, asking forgiveness, you would thus have changed and no longer be the same, do I forgive? What do I forgive? And whom? Something or someone?" (Derrida, 38). The idea of forgiveness therefore is meaningful only in the presence of the unforgivable. In the narrative, despite the crimes committed by David, Amal does not judge him. likewise, David, forgives his surrogate father and mother for their crimes of stealing the Arab child.

Readings that Amal did to Sara at the time of Dawn like Hasan did to her in the refugee camps from Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* sheds light on the necessity of "individual freshness" with succeeding generations:

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you, and though

They are with you yet they belong not to you . . .

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

You make strive to be like them but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward nor carries with yesterday. (Abulhawa, 248)

Thomas Stearns Eliot, one of the twentieth century's major poet in his best-known essay, "Tradition and Individual Talent" (1919) presented the idea of tradition as a dynamic entity, which keeps on developing with the changing times. The overpowering organic inheritance of the grievances on either side of the divide in the Israeli and Palestinian context but seems to throttle "individual talent" of the coming generations. It has led to a static state of suffocating division that desires fresh perspective for revocation. Amal understands the importance of friendly demonstrative gestures as in the very first encounter with David in the vicinity of her home, she appears extremely humane: "Amal loved David instinctively; despite herself and despite what he had done or who he had become. She ached to gather him in an embrace and absolve the pangs of conscience that tormented him. She wanted to fill a seat at his table and share in his loneliness" (Abulhawa, 270). David possesses a soft corner for Amal too over and above her ethnic identity. He takes care of her security when she visits him in the camp. Positing suffering as an ontological priority, Amal and David were able to suspend judgement and engage in a meaningful dialogue. It brings us to the notion that individual freshness does possess the ability to override inherited hatred. Creating a shared future is not that difficult after all, given the reality of peaceful co-existence between the two communities in the near past.

V. CONCLUSION

In an interview with Hilit Yeshurun in 1996 for an Israeli literary journal *Hadarim*, Mahmoud Darwish suggested the unsettling but natural outcome of the historic collision between Israel and Palestine:

It is impossible to evade the place that the Israeli has occupied in my identity. He exists, whatever I may think of him. He is a physical and psychological fact. The Israelis changed the Palestinian and vice versa. The Israelis are not the same as they were when they came, and the Palestinians are not the same people that once were.

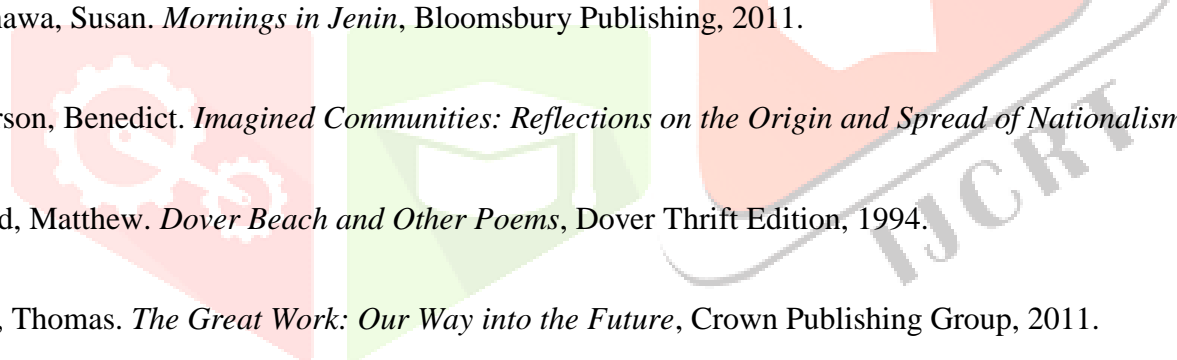
(Exile, 63)

Arabs and Jews have lived together in the holy land for centuries. Darwish's statement confirms that the history has triggered a process of acculturation between the Israelis and Palestinians that can no longer be denied. Abulhawa's character Ismael and David presents the necessity of recognizing alternative outcomes of this collision which unsettles the domain of enemy discourses and forces one to (re)consider one's own arena of subjective perception. The character of Amal upholds strong principles of ethics and empathy that seems necessary to break the "iron walls of inhumanity." This willingness to listen to the other may transform the negative bonds of mistrust and hatred between Arab and Jews considerably. It brings forth the possibility of breaking out of the old patterns of thinking, moving forward, and abandoning deep-rooted stereotypical thinking. But how can such a transformation be accomplished?

It is essential to first unlock the "conceptual disarray" regarding notions of identity which appears to be at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Recent debates in postcolonial theory focuses on the scope of justice in relation to the notions of Cosmopolitanism and Communitarianism. Though it is true that "cosmopolitan gaze" has historically been that of the powerful and wealthy. The logic follows the conclusion that the praxis of cosmopolitanism by the elite might be good for the subalterns, but the subalterns themselves can never be cosmopolitans. National identity is often seen as a source of strengthening mutual action of the suppressed groups. For both Israelis and Palestinians, completely repudiating nationalism is difficult, rather what can be expected of them is cultivation of a "cosmopolitan sensibility" that would also rectify the despotic, fascist elements in their respective national politics. Cosmopolitanism and communitarianism are hence to be pursued simultaneously and not sequentially for balancing the shortcomings of each viewpoint.

The hope of harmony in the contemporary world is indeed predicted on a clearer understanding of the pluralities of human identity and cultivating an appreciation of these fuzziness that work against a sharp separation along one single hardened line of impenetrable division. Moving out of our rigidly incarcerated “little containers” of choiceless identities, we need to thus understand the importance of “freedom of choice” to determine our loyalties and priorities between various affiliations. Humankind as “consciousness of earth” as Thomas Berry calls them, need to establish a new paradigm of human relationship, intellectually and emotionally cutting across artificial borders. The power to sustain, renew and transform our lives lay within us. The task of our times is then to “reinvent the human-- at the species level with critical reflections.” As Rabindranath Tagore rightly proposes: “neither the colorless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship, is the goal of human history.” (Tagore, 5)

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